

College loans push grads to ads

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April Fool's Day 2012 has been history for nearly a month now. A news story that appeared in one of our local newspapers on April 1, however, still deserves comment.

Two graduates of Cambridge University in London, aged 22, were eating instant noodles six months ago while brainstorming over how to pay off hefty loans they owed for their college education. One of them wondered how much money companies might offer per day to rent their faces for advertisements.

What captured my attention was not so much the title of the article about these guys, but the photo that accompanied it (TT 4-1-12 p. 12). There they were, the faces of Ross Harper and Ed Moyses, foreheads touching, almost nose to nose. On the left, a cheek upon which we see, in red, the word SOLD. On the right, the guy's buddy staring back at him eyeball-to-eyeball like a boxer trying to psyche out his opponent and, on his cheek, BUY MY FACE.

The article claims these two have not gone a single working day since last October, when all this began, without a sale.

They made a modest start, asking for a single British pound for one day's work, both faces wearing advertising, the young men standing at peak hours in crowded public venues in London. Business soon came pouring into their company, "Buy My Face." On average they are now charging 100 times the amount they earned on Day One. They are making the equivalent of 160 US dollars a day.

Harper and Moyses (why does that make me think of Simon and Garfunkel?) also do "eye-catching stunts, from skydiving to plunging into icy rivers" for their clients. They film their antics and then post them (with painted faces) on their company website. Depending on their grandeur and difficulty, the stunts may earn them as much as 400 pounds a day. This translates into 640 US smackers or, better yet, \$NT 19,000.

All of this, mind you, is to pay off debts accrued while getting a college education.

The equivalent of \$ NT 19,000 for a day's work is, remember, 400 times the figure the duo was making

when this story began. I won't ask if you make \$ NT 19,000 a day. I am nearing a pretty big birthday, and am dead sure I have never made that kind of money on any day of my entire life.

The enterprising spirit of Harper and Moyses suggests the value of bravery and the value of the human imagination. These men have managed to use their youthful energy profitably, managed to have found a need out there in the market that they can meet. They succeed by doing something very ordinary in an unordinary way.

Their goal is immediate, not long-term gain. Harper and Moyses are patiently taking one step at a time. They hope to continue to peddle their marked-up faces and leaps through various hoops on camera until their company is one year old. Then they want to step back and serve as managers of other painted faces and other advertising spectacles. They plan to recruit, train, and launch an advertising kingdom far beyond anything they had in mind only months ago.

Millions of students around the world are getting a college education today on borrowed money. Surely this harsh reality troubles them and their parents. It should trouble us professors as well.

When I consider the sacrifices the parents of my students and often my students themselves are making to earn a college or graduate degree under the guidance of our faculty, I can't help but question the quality of my own performance. Am I giving these young people what they deserve in exchange for what they are paying? Money we can measure, but that is not the only cost, of course. Students and families pay for education with enormous investments of time and worry. Students "buy" an education by doing lots of reading, writing, listening, and reporting. This selling of faces story pushes me to look into a mirror and study my own face as an educator.

Harper and Moyses clearly did some analysis before starting Buy My Face. They did a ton of independent thinking. And they weren't afraid to look at life, laugh, and take some chances. Bravo, I say. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking Point

- 1) Do you or your friends worry about paying off loans for your college education?
- 2) Do you feel the quality of education and services that you receive at Fu da is worth the cost of tuition?
- 3) This column focuses on two students who just graduated, and who work on their debt problem by "selling their faces" for advertising. Can you imagine this or a similar strange job succeeding here in Taiwan?